

The Petticoat Vote

“A thousand kisses.” That’s how Elizabeth Cady Stanton ended letters to her children. And seven children meant a lot of kisses! Like other young mothers in the 1800s, Elizabeth cooked, cleaned, and sewed for her family. And through it all, she fought for the rights of women.

American women didn’t always have the same rights as men. Married women couldn’t own property, and no woman could vote. Elizabeth didn’t think that was fair. So in 1848, she organized a meeting in Seneca Falls, New York, and suggested that women should have the right to vote. America was shocked. Most Americans—even most women—thought women should stick to wearing petticoats (frilly underskirts) and leave politics to men.

Elizabeth had big ideas, but how could she change America’s thinking when she had a family to care for? Her husband was often away from home. She couldn’t leave her children alone while she traveled around the country arguing for the right to vote. Then Elizabeth Cady Stanton met Susan B. Anthony. Susan was working to outlaw slavery and alcohol abuse, and fighting for men and women to be paid the same wages. Elizabeth’s ideas about woman suffrage—

Women were expected to spend a lot of time in the kitchen (below).



the right to vote—made sense to Susan. The two women became a team. Elizabeth stayed home, organized meetings, and wrote letters and speeches. Susan, who had no husband or children, traveled across America giving Elizabeth’s speeches. Elizabeth said about Susan: “I forged the thunderbolts, she fired them.”

By 1867, Elizabeth’s children were old enough that she could leave them. For the next ten years, she traveled eight months each year, giving speeches, meeting with lawmakers, and building support all over America. But it wasn’t until 1920—18 years after Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s death—that her dream came true. The 19th Amendment gave American women the right to vote in all elections.

Susan B. Anthony might sit on the face of our dollar coin, but it was her friend, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who first inspired women to fight for the right to vote. That busy mother with the sparkling eyes and kind smile worked tirelessly over her lifetime for what she believed was fair. A thousand kisses to you, Elizabeth Cady Stanton!

Adapted from an article by Carol Peterson

Elizabeth Cady Stanton



Susan B. Anthony



Instead, they organized meetings and made speeches to give women more choices (below right).

